

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3-C

WASHINGTON TIMES
5 February 1985

Was this intelligence source silenced by media exposure?

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A small story on Page 19 of *The Washington Post* of Jan. 23, reported that the French government had recalled one of its diplomats from India after he was implicated in a spy scandal in that country. Two private French citizens who also were reportedly involved already had fled the country.

The Indian government had arrested several high officials in the prime minister's office on charges of providing information to an unidentified foreign power. The home minister told Parliament that it had not yet been determined what foreign intelligence agency was involved.

The story went on to say that the Indian government had been alerted to the espionage operation by stories that had appeared in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* last Sept. 15. The stories concerned a CIA briefing of the Senate Intelligence Committee. They discussed a top-secret recommendation to the prime minister of India by some of her advisers suggesting a pre-emptive strike against a nuclear reactor in

Pakistan. The Indian government deduced that there must have been a leak from the prime minister's office. Surveillance of aides working in the office was begun, with the result that several aides were accused of divulging information to unauthorized foreigners.

The first report of the CIA briefing of the Senate Intelligence Committee appeared on ABC's "World News Tonight" on Sept. 13. Anchorman Peter Jennings read this statement: "There is concern on Capitol Hill tonight about a possible confrontation between India and Pakistan. ABC's John Scali has learned that some senators became alarmed after they learned of a possible Indian attack on a Pakistani nuclear facility. U.S. intelligence authorities insist that no special warning was given to the senators

that any attack on the facility was imminent, that this was just one of several trouble spots worth watching closely. There has long been concern in India that Pakistan might be constructing a nuclear device. Pakistan has said it was not."

Two days later, on Sept. 15, Philip Taubman had a long story in *The New York Times* reporting that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had

received recommendations from some of her senior advisers that India carry out an air strike against the nuclear reactor at Kahuta, Pakistan. The purpose would be to prevent the development of nuclear weapons by the Pakistanis. Mr. Taubman said that both Sens. Barry Goldwater and Daniel Patrick Moynihan had expressed concern about the possibility of an Indian air strike against the Kahuta installation. Mr. Taubman said: "The CIA told the Senate committee, according to two members, that it had learned from a sensitive intelligence source that Mrs. Gandhi received recommendations this year from some senior aides that India attack the Kahuta plant to make sure that the enrichment process was not used for the development of weapons."

The Washington Post story by Don Oberdorfer reported that govern-

ment officials in Washington had discounted as "alarmist" the ABC News report that Prime Minister Gandhi had been urged by her advisers to attack the Pakistani nuclear installation. Mr. Oberdorfer said some officials noted that the report appeared to come from a CIA briefing of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

It would appear that the CIA had acquired its information from a foreign intelligence agency that had developed valuable assets within the Indian government, a government with close ties to the Soviet Union. The CIA shared that information with senators, and some of them promptly blabbed to the media. The

intelligence operation was destroyed, and we can assume that the foreign source will be less willing to share its secrets with the CIA in the future.

Apparently neither the senators nor the journalists worried about what would happen to the sensitive source if the information were made public. The people who run *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* claim that they are qualified to decide what should be kept secret.

Question: Did they blow this operation on purpose or did they goof?

Reed Irvine is chairman of Accuracy in Media.